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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003562

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: NAJAF: ISCI LOOKS STRONG BUT FACES WELL-ORGANIZED
ELECTION OPPOSITION

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Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor John Fox for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Days before the release of the open list candidates for January provincial elections, the relative surface calm of Najaf,s ISCI domination of the provincial government is beginning to reveal turbulent anti-ISCI undercurrents. ISCI officials, led by Deputy Governor Abtan, continue their open campaign to associate themselves with the Marja,iya and major provincial reconstruction projects. Non-ISCI election hopefuls are forming behind a loose Da'wa-affiliated coalition and hope to capitalize on tribal voting and the anti-provincial government angst of Najaf and Kufa,s lower socio-economic bracket. Da'wa contacts indicate that they will also form alliances with Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) election lists. End summary.

Deputy Governor Abtan and the Fate of ISCI

12. (C) Najaf Governor Asaad Abu Gelal al Ta,ie, a Finnish citizen, scion of a historically important Najaf family, and multi-decade non-combatant ISCI official, will not appear on the ISCI list and will likely retire from provincial politics. In his place Deputy Governor Abdul Hussein Abtan, known as Hajji Hassan, intends to be the top ISCI candidate and postures with the PRT as inevitable heir apparent to the governorship. Abtan has held numerous press events, specifically tying him to the opening of the Najaf International Airport and the opening of new housing construction and other headline investment projects in the province. Abtan travels with several camera crews and lavishly appears in photographs adorning posters, websites, and all print material highlighting Najaf,s reconstruction projects. Governor Asaad has been conspicuously absent from the province lately, spending the majority of October in Europe for medical and family reasons. He departed Najaf again on November 2 for a trip to the United States for the Iraq Oil and Gas Summit in Houston.

13. (C) Abtan and ISCI are universally maligned by non-ISCI officials, with many PRT contacts insisting that they do not know of a single friend or neighbor who supports ISCI leading up to January elections. Da'wa PC member and leading candidate Sheikh Fayed al-Shimmeri asserted that ISCI is thoroughly corrupt and soon to be chastised at the ballot for its failure to develop the province. The Iraqi National Accord and Loyalty to Najaf directors reiterated a similar claim that 90 percent of the province demands new leadership and the end of ISCI,s single-party domination of the province. Al-Shimmeri also insisted that the current PC is ready to go public with specific corruption allegations against Abtan and other high-ranking ISCI provincial government officials.

14. (C) PRT contacts also predict ISCI will not play fair in the election, employing tactics ranging from bribery and vote purchasing to fraudulent ballot box activity. A source who works in ISCI,s Najaf political office told IPAO "truckloads" of money were brought to Najaf to support the

election and that Iranian political advisors are developing strategies for ISCI candidates in the South Central provinces. Abtan himself is known to be a former Badr general and prior to joining Najaf provincial politics was in charge of Badr,s financial operations and regional coordination. In addition, Governorate Elections Office chair Dr. Bushra al-Zamili is alleged to be married to a Badr Colonel and suspected of pro-ISCI voter fraud in the 2005 provincial elections.

Adnan al-Zurfi and the "Loyalty to Najaf" List

15. (C) Though the PRT anticipates numerous competitive lists ranging from the Communist party list to nominally independent OMS lists, the acknowledged challenger to ISCI is a loose Da'wa coalition led by Adnan al-Zurfi,s "Loyalty to Najaf" list. Adnan is currently Director of Intelligence for the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and a former Najaf governor who has waged an anti-Badr campaign since 2003. Adnan,s name is now unlikely to appear on the top of the list, according to Tal Bilal, Adnan,s Deputy Governor and top lieutenant, because Prime Minister Maliki advised Adnan to remain in Baghdad and return to Najaf only if a resounding victory from his coalition sets the stage for his election as governor by the next provincial council. Contacts insist the Loyalty to Najaf list has significant and genuine support from Kufa and from non-ISCI intelligentsia in Najaf city. In addition, Tal Bilal insists his list has the organization and the money to sway poorer voters away from ISCI. He also insists that OMS lists will partner with Loyalty to Najaf against ISCI to ensure that the selection of the next Najaf governor, deputy governor, and provincial council chairman reflects their common interests. A Da,wa PC member seconded this sentiment, insisting that OMS lists will partner with Da,wa and the Loyalty to Najaf list.

16. (C) Both Governor Asaad and Deputy Governor Abtan informed

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the PRT over the last several months that Adnan al-Zurfi has threatened top ISCI officials with arrest warrants and assassination. Recently, the MoI issued an arrest warrant against former Badr combatant and current commander of Najaf SWAT, Abu Ridha. This event sparked the first potentially violent moment for the election season as Badr-affiliated local MoI police broke ranks with nationally directed MoI elements by protecting Ridha.

17. (C) Comment: ISCI, despite facing genuine and organized opposition in the leadup to January elections, is still the party to beat. Due to patronage, projects, and cash, ISCI ensured that many Najaf officials, tribes, and lists are in their pocket. ISCI officials are scared of Adnan al-Zurfi,s MoI power and well-organized Loyalty to Najaf list. The PRT is not fully convinced of the opposition,s claims to large scale support and cross-list cohesion. The release of election candidates, names and the next round of meetings will shed light on many of these unknown elements. End comment.

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